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ABSTRACT

In response to legislative examination of student tuition and fees in Colorado postsecondary education, this paper outlines the position of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education on the policy issues of expense base, sector pricing, and unit pricing. The State Board's Policy BP 4-20, reprinted in the document, stresses the relation of lower-range tuition costs to the aim of maintaining open-door access to education without discrimination. As such, the State Board annually reviews and approves tuition rates and policies to insure that such costs do not pose a barrier to student access to education. The Board agrees with the current definition of the expense base, which refers to those costs included in the calculation of tuition costs. However, it does not believe that special purpose programs (sponsored programs directed toward specific clienteles) should, in the interests of equity, be included in calculating tuition rates. The Board also agrees with the concept of sector pricing, which allows for uniform tuition charges for Colorado resident students regardless of the size and location of the college, but opposes the increase in the cost basis from 20% to 22.5% of cost in establishing tuition rates. This increase blurs the distinction between two- and four-year colleges and may ultimately impose financial access barriers. In regard to unit pricing, the Board endorses a change in the definition of a full-time student to 15 credit hours per term, with part-time students assessed at 1/15 of the full-time rate for each credit hour. This would provide equity between full- and part-time students. Finally, the Board opposes the tuition surcharge assessed against students enrolling for more than 18 credit hours, since it unfairly discriminates against occupational students. (HB)

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STUDENT TUITION AND FEES

AND

COLORADO'S COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGES

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COLORADO STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

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"There are three basic components which have worked in concert to produce a financial barrier to higher education for many students, each of which looms larger today than a decade ago. They include direct costs (i.e., tuition, fees, books, and commutation), subsistence costs (room, board, clothing, and other personal expenses), and indirect costs (foregone personal income and reduced contribution to family support)."[1] On August 16, 1977, the Interim Legislative Committee on Higher Education directed its attention towards the direct costs of student tuition and fees in Colorado postsecondary educational institutions. Additionally, related presentations were made at that time by several representatives of the various participant groups which comprise the postsecondary education community.

This paper has been prepared for the express purpose of describing in a definitive manner the position of the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education on these issues. Such elaboration is deemed imperative as the State Board recognizes that the issue of pricing (i.e., student tuition and fees) is directly related to that of access. Moreover, these direct costs, when taken together, often comprise a major component of the cost of receiving postsecondary educational services for many students in Colorado's two-year colleges.

To accomplish our stated purpose, the remainder of the paper has been structured to discuss initially the State Board's philosophical position on

pricing and then to more specifically address certain facets of Colorado's tuition policy as it currently exists.

Philosophical Position

The State Board's Policy BP 4-20, Student Tuition and Fees, presents the philosophical premise for these costs in Colorado's community junior colleges as follows:

"Basic premise for lower range tuition costs and the assessing of fees

a. If indeed the State of Colorado is to join the national movement toward providing a complete comprehensive community college program for its citizens, it must accept the philosophical tenet of providing universal availability of at least two years of higher education, both within financial and geographical reach of every person who can profit from such instruction.

b. The open-door philosophy of the two-year communtiy college takes into account two major considerations: one involves the academic criteria for admission, and the other relates to the financial means to obtain educational opportunity beyond the high school years.

1) An open-door philosophy maintains the opportunity for students to qualify for admission regardless of past academic performance, as long as it can be interpreted that the student can profit from such instruction. This guarantees the "right to try" regardless of age, or past achievement patterns. At the same time, the "open-door" does not imply the impairing of quality or standards of the educational program.

2) The open-door philosophy also provides equal educational opportunity regardless of personal, financial, or socio-economic circumstances of the community colleges' clientele.

c. By far the strongest arguments for a low tuition cost to community college students rests with the research that bears out that still large segments of the population do not continue education beyond high school. A recent study by the Center for the Study of Higher Education, Berkeley, A/ of the socio-economic background of college studetns, clearly indicates that students from upper-level socio-economic standing are disproportionately represented.

The conclusion drawn is that studetns from lower socio-economic levels do not have sufficient levels of personal expectiation or personal financial resources to attend college. In short, cultural, racial, and socio-economic levels appear to be a significant variable affecting a student's decision to attend college.

It can be demonstrated that lower tuition charges significantly raise the level of expectation of middle, lower-middle, and lower social class students.

A Florida study of junior college studetns reported in "Junior Colleges - 20 States" B/ found that 48 percent of the students attended because of the proximity of the campuses to their homes, that 27 percent claimed that cost was a major factor in their choice of colleges, and that over 70 percent indicated that they had achieved the highest educational level in their immediate families.

d. Tuition charges for communtiy colleges must not be discriminatory, either on the basis of the student's selection of program, e.g., occupational and transfer, nor should tuition charges be based on the location of community college's service, e.g., urban vs. rural, suburban vs. ethnically concentrated areas.

e. Tuition and fees should be low enough so that every student can see his way to pay. Each student should be expected to pay some part or fraction of his communtiy college education, however minimal this portion may be in relation to the total cost of his education.

f. Tuition should be distinguished from fee charges in the following way: Tuition constitutes some fraction of the cost of the student's education, whereas fees make up only those incidental costs to the institution that normally cannot be administratively controlled. Fees are protective in nature, designed primarily to allow the individual institution to cover incidental costs such as late registration, health services, breakage and other special services rendered to the student."

A/ Medsker, Leland. Center for the Study of Higher Education. Berkeley, CA.

B/ Junior Colleges - 20 States, AACJC, 1966.

Thus, the State Board's commitment to the open-door philosophy relies heavily upon its position on student tuition and fees. Those citizens who can profit from instruction in a community junior college can only be served if the barriers to the receipt of such services are eliminated, and pricing represents a major factor in this regard. Moreover, the community junior college remains the primary postsecondary educational delivery system for the majority of

Colorado's citizens, and it is imperative that access be maintained in response to the needs and demands of our increasingly complex and rapidly changing technological society.

A final comment regarding the State Board's "Student Tuition and Fees" policy merits attention at this juncture. Section 3 of BP 4-20 notes that "The State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education will approve all tuition and fee charges at State system community junior colleges." This policy statement provides for a process whereby the State Board annually reviews and approves tuition rates and policies to insure compliance with the appropriations measure. Similarly, a process is also maintained for the review and approval of student fee assessments to insure that such costs do not pose a barrier to student access and are assessed only for valid purposes.

Colorado's Tuition Policy

In this section, the policy issues of expense base, sector pricing, and unit pricing will be discussed. The expense base refers to those costs included in the calculation of tuition rates. The State Board agrees with the expense base as currently defined with one exception, that of special purpose programs. These are sponsored programs, albeit appropriated, which are directed towards specific clienteles. Their inclusion in the expense base represents the only instance in Colorado in which sponsored programs are included in the expense base. It is our opinion that such costs, in the interest of equity, should not be included in calculating tuition rates, as they are not part of the general operating expenses incurred in serving those students funded via State appropriations.

The State Board also agrees with the concept of sector pricing as it is currently employed for Colorado resident students in two-year colleges. To do otherwise would result in differing tuition charges based upon the location and size of the colleges and therefore would be contrary to the mission of

the communtiy junior college delivery system. However, the State Board does not concur with the increase from 20 percent to 22.5 percent of cost as the basis for establishing resident tuition rates, as this change represents an increasing tendency to pass on educational costs to the students, a process which can ultimately result in the imposition of financial barriers to student access. Moreover, this change tends to blur the distinctions between the roles, missions, and clientele of two-year collegs and baccalaureate institutions, and it is the State Board's belief that such distinctions must be maintained within the pricing structure.

Finally, as regards unit pricing, the State Board endorses a change in the definition of a full-time student for tuition purposes to fifteen credit hours in a academic term, with part-time students assessed 1/15 of the full-time rate for each credit hour. This position would result in tuition being charged in a manner consistent with the definition of a full-time student used in cost considerations and would provide equity between full- and part-time studetns. However, the State Board strongly opposes the tuition surcharge assessed students who enroll for more than eighteen hours, because such charges discriminate against occupational students who typically enroll for larger credit hour loads. Additionally, a surcharge discourages those students wishing to complete their educational objectives in a shorter time period at a reduced cost to both the students and the State.

In summary, this paper has presented the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education's position concerning student tuition and fees and its belief that these costs are particularly important in terms of student access to a postsecondary education of two-years or less. As regards current State tuition policies and procedures, the State Board believes that special purpose programs should be removed from the cost base used in calculating tuition rates and that the percentage factor applied to that base should be reduced from 22.5 percent to 20 percent. Additionally, the State Board

proposes an alternative tuition policy whereby full-time-equivalency for tuition purposes is equated with that used for cost purposes, part-time students would be assessed at 1/15 of the full-time rate, and the tuition surcharge would be eliminated. Concerning the tuition surcharge, the State Board has adopted an alternative procedure which addresses the apparent desire on the part of the legislature to limit credit hour enrollments of individual students in favor of serving additional headcount. This policy position is as follows:

> "There is a maximum credit hour load of 20 hours per term for individual students enrolled in State system community junior colleges with the following exceptions: (a) Those students enrolled in certain approved vocational programs (approved by the State Board) who may enroll for a maximum of 24 credit hours; and (b) Those special circumstances in which the student has obtained the written permission of an appropriate administrative official of the college."

NOTES

1. Richard I. Ferrin, Barriers to Universal Higher Education (Palo Alto, Cal: Access Research Office, College Entrance Examination Board, March 1970), pp. 7-8.

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